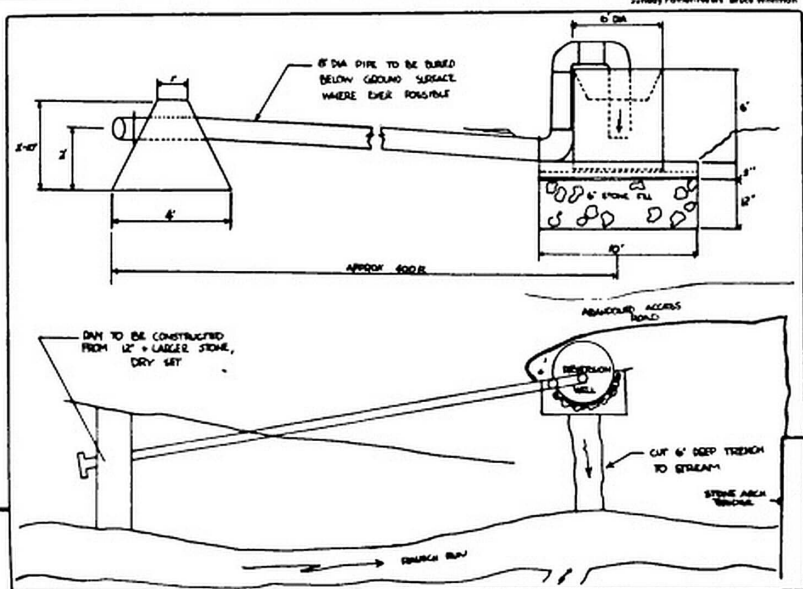




Sunday Patriot-News, Bruce Whitman

Project ahead

The Dauphin Chapter of Trout Unlimited plans to construct a stream improvement project on Rausch Creek, above, where it flows into Stony Creek in Lebanon County. The diversion well, right, would combat acid mine drainage.



Rausch Creek gets an assist

Rausch Creek is about as pretty a place as you'll find in outdoor Pennsylvania. It rises on Stony Mountain in western Lebanon County and works its way to a marriage with Stony Creek midway between Cold Springs and Goldmine.

Hikers on the Appalachian Trail cross Rausch Creek as they pass through State Game Lands 211. One would expect native brook trout to lurk under boulders and along undercut banks. Hemlocks, hardwoods and mountain laurel shade and cool its course.

However, there are no brook trout, or any other fish life for that matter, in Rausch Creek. Like a poisoned apple, its outer beauty is only a cover for the real thing.

Rausch Creek has been dead for nearly a century. Man killed it when he worked both pit and surface coal mines in the region. Acid mine drainage seeps into the stream, leaving traces of Yellowboy in its wake. It's bad enough that this pretty mountain stream is lost forever, but what makes it even worse is that Rausch Creek carries its deadly acidity all the way to its meeting with Stony Creek.

Upstream from where Rausch enters Stony, tiny, native brook trout have been detected on repeated field surveys. The natural

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Bruce Whitman



neighborhood required to support native trout and insect life goes down the tubes where the two streams join.

The Dauphin Chapter of Trout Unlimited wants to do something about the situation. By late May, the group hopes to have construction underway on a device which could greatly improve the water quality of Rausch Creek. If the TU group is successful in its bid to mitigate the acidity in Rausch Creek, things will have to improve in Stony Creek as well.

TU is counting on a diversion well. A low head dam will be constructed on Rausch Creek, about 400 feet upstream from the old railroad bed and stone arch bridge. Water will flow downhill through eight-inch PVC pipe to a large concrete container or standpipe, where it will flow rapidly through soluble limestone, then return to the main stream bed. It's hoped that the percolating action through

the limestone will improve the water's pH factor by as much as a full point.

"Estimated cost for project construction is something around \$14,000," said Ronald G. Evans, Dauphin TU Chapter president. "We're hoping to lower that considerably through the donation of materials, labor and equipment time. We have about \$3,000 raised already, with \$1,800 coming from a National TU Brightwater program grant."

The TU group had to get approval from several state and federal agencies for the project, including the state Game and Fish Commissions, Department of Environmental Resources, U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The idea for the diversion well came from Sweden, where they're being used to combat acid rain.

"If we can raise the average pH by as much as a full point, it's hoped that brook trout will be able to survive in that area of Stony Creek," related Evans. "They've been able to do that in Sweden where similar pH problems have been encountered."

Dr. Dean Arnold of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Penn State and several students have conducted a great deal of preliminary field work on the

project and will continue to monitor the stream once the device is on line.

Evans said the well would have to be serviced about every 10 days to two weeks. This would require refilling the diversion well with limestone which would be trucked from a local quarry and stored at the site. Because of the remote location and limited access, the project might be reached only by snowmobiles during winter months.

"If we can do some good with this idea on Rausch Creek, there are other streams in the area that could also benefit from this approach," said Evans.

✓ The Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs will hold its spring convention Saturday and Sunday at the Sheraton Inn-Shenango in West Middlesex, Mercer County.

Commissioners and staff members of the state Game and Fish Commissions will be on hand to make reports. Dr. Craig C. Chase of Slippery Rock University will speak at Saturday night's banquet. A general meeting Sunday will see delegates act on several resolutions including one dealing with noise pollution legislation and existing gun clubs and shooting ranges.